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Old Testament Notes.

PROF. D. B. MACDONALD.

HARTFORD, CONN.

1. Ecclesiastes 3¹¹: גם את העולם נתן בלבם מבלי אשר לא ימצא האדם את המעשה אשר עשה האלהים מראש ועד סוף: "What unsophisticated Hebrew writer could possibly have understood this saying?" asks Cheyne in his *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*, p. 198. The question is to the point and applies to every translation that accepts the reading העולם. It does not matter whether we take it as 'the world' or 'worldliness' or 'eternity' in any connotation or denotation; we are left with an idea that is in place in Emerson's "Sphinx" as "the fiend that man harries," but which is eminently out of place in a book written in Biblical Hebrew, however late. Yet, so far as the text of the saying is concerned, there does not seem to be a particle of evidence pointing to a different reading; the versions all support the Massorettes.

In spite of this unanimity of attestation, the difficulty of the passage is so great that I venture to suggest a conjectural emendation. The argument for any such change must consist in the new reading's fitting the context perfectly, and, if possible, moving the whole section into a new and clear light. An emendation must be not only satisfactory in point of sense but also illuminative; only so can it prove its truth. The reading which I would suggest here is העמל, and I would then translate the whole passage, "Also toil He has appointed for their heart (or mind), so that man cannot find out from beginning to end the work which God has done." In translating ב 'for' I base on Qôhéleth's own usage. In 2²⁴ we read אין טוב כאדם, 'There is no good for mankind'; and in 3¹² ידעתי כי אין טוב בם, 'I know that there is no good for them.'

The careful reader of Ecclesiastes cannot fail to notice how great must have been the influence of the early chapters of Genesis with the stories of the creation and the fall on the mind of its writer. What was his attitude towards these stories may be a large and doubtful question; but that they attracted him and roused his thought seems certain. They may only have played for him the

part that the myth of Prometheus, for example, does for us, or they may have been literally true stories of the childhood of the world as they were to our fathers. However that may be, he comes back to them again and again ; they are starting points for him and his thinking, fundamental puzzles full of exasperation and attraction. His God is largely their God, the Creator and Appointer of all things. He has made all things beautiful ; He has made mankind and beasts from the ground ; they are made from the dust and return to the dust again. Before Him mankind and the beasts of the field are alike ; only, man knows good and evil ; he can think of life and weary himself trying to read its moral riddles. How he has reached this, Qôhéleth does not say ; but it is clear that God for him was constantly limiting man in his aspirations and strivings, had indeed found it necessary to limit him. Thus God is jealous of man lest he should attain too far, and read his whole work from beginning to end. What we understand, we are ; and the man who can read all God's workings is God. Therefore man is driven out of the Garden ; toil is appointed for him, — to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow ; so God has willed, that he may weary himself out there-with. Thus all man's work, of body or of mind, is but a means of drawing his fetters closer and reducing him again to the level of the beasts of the field. Qôhéleth's worldly wisdom is that man should recognize this ; he should cease to struggle, and should accept the barriers set by One who is stronger than he.

But how does 'toil' suit the immediate context? The thought of the first part of the chapter is that the whole world consists of parts fitting together, each into each, each at its own season, and each balancing each. There is love, there is also hate ; there is war, there is also peace. As the one thing exists, so the other exists, — in its season. But when a man works, what gain has he in his toil? What balances his toil, coming in its season? That God has given a wearying toil to man is a fixed thing that must be accepted. But He has also made everything beautiful, that is, good, in its season ; and so, too, it is with toil. It is true that it has been appointed by God for a purpose, and that is to prevent man from reading God's working as a whole, but there is also a gain for man in it, something that comes to balance it, and that is the pleasure that man has in toil. That, too, is the gift of God, and man should accept it and use it, should rejoice and be good to himself, eat, drink, and enjoy his toil. Enjoyment in toil (2²⁴) is the only certain good in life that Qôhéleth has found.

2. Amos 5²⁵: **וּבְחִים וּמִנְחָה הִגַּשְׁתָּם לִי בַמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה**; **בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל**; This is usually translated, "Did ye bring me sacrifices and meal-offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" Such a rendering evidently expects the answer, No, and thence the conclusion is drawn that to the historical memory of Amos's age the period of the wanderings in the wilderness had been one without sacrifices and meal-offerings. I will attempt to show that this translation is false and that the passage will not bear the conclusion commonly drawn from it. Two points seem generally¹ to have been neglected: first, the force of **הִגִּישׁ** and of the root **נָגַשׁ** as a whole, and, secondly, the emphatic position of **וּבְחִים וּמִנְחָה**.

First, as to **הִגִּישׁ**. This is not a technical term meaning 'to offer,' though Siegfried-Stade says so explicitly, and Gesenius-Buhl suggests the same. None of the cases quoted (I leave out of account, of course, this passage) supports that force. All it means is to bring near into any one's presence or to put before any person or any thing; it is used of bringing to the altar, but not of offering on the altar. Further, the root **נָגַשׁ** is used of approach to God, in worship and otherwise; thus of lip worship, Is. 29¹³, **וּבִשְׁפָתַי כִּבְדֹּנִי**, **נָגַשׁ הָעַם הוּא בִפְיוֹ וּבִשְׁפָתָיו**; **וּלְבֹו רַחֵק מִמֶּנִּי**; **וּלְבֹו רַחֵק מִמֶּנִּי**; The question is therefore legitimate, Why did Amos use this general term instead of, e.g. **הִעֲלָה**² (used in v.²² with **עֹלֹת** and **מִנְחֹת**, and with **מִנְחָה** Is. 66³), or **וָבָח**, which would have been strictly parallel to **וּבְחִים**, or **הִבִּיא** as in Lev. 11⁸? Had he possibly to use a word which would apply to other things besides these altar offerings?

Second, as to the emphatic position of the words. Is not the correct translation of Prov. 30⁷, **שְׁתֵּים שָׁאֲלָתִי מֵאַתָּךְ**, "Only two things do I ask of thee"? If a **ה** interrogative were prefixed, should we not have to translate thus, "Have I asked only two things of thee?" Again, take Gen. 42¹², **עֵרֹת הָאָרֶץ כְּאֵת לִרְאֹתָ**; must we not render, "It is nothing but the nakedness of the land ye have come to see," or words to that effect? And if a **ה** interrogative were prefixed, would not the true rendering be, "Is it only the nakedness of the land that ye have come to see?"

I feel therefore compelled to render the passage in Amos, "Was

¹ Geo. A. Smith (*The Twelve Prophets* i., p. 170) renders, "Was it flesh or meal-offerings that ye brought Me . . . ?" but on p. 103 he has, "Did ye offer unto Me sacrifices and gifts . . . ?" Which of these renderings does he regard as correct?

² N. Schmidt, in the *JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE* xiii. 11, renders **תַּעֲלֵה** **לִי** here and **הִגַּשְׁתָּם לִי** alike by "ye bring me."

it only (or nothing but) flesh-sacrifices and meal-offerings that ye brought to me in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?" And the answer expected can only be, We brought to thee other things as well, true worship of the heart and righteousness, public and private. Such a translation renders the emphatic position of the words, and explains why Amos had here to use **הגיש** and not a specific sacrificial term. It also fits perfectly into the context, but it does *not* prove that in the wilderness there were no **זבחים** and **מנחות**.